

## **Deputy Minister holds Imbizo with officials and offenders at St Albans**

Deputy Minister Thabang Makwetla returned to St Albans Management Area on 13 June 2017 to fulfil an undertaking he made late last year that he will oversee management's efforts to ease the strained relations between officials and offenders. The visit also followed the launch of a stakeholder engagement session on a collaborative anti-gang strategy in March 2017 to address gang-influenced feuds between officials.

About 400 sentenced offenders packed the dining hall of the B-Unit, situated in the vicinity of where violent confrontations between offenders and officials took place in October 2014.

St Albans's maximum correctional centre has experienced a spate of violence since 26 December 2016 in which three offenders died and more than a dozen officials got injury in a single incident.

Deputy Minister Makwetla has been hard at work in leading the management team to find solutions to the problem. "The spilling of blood in an environment that is aimed at constructively repairing offending behaviour is unacceptable," he said. The Deputy Minister told offenders their concerns have been noted, and it would take a great deal of work to resolve them. He said the results might not be seen overnight but will progressively be visible as actions are taken.

Offenders grabbed the opportunity to speak out on a number of issues, which included:

- Recreational activities, skills development or educational development
- Language barriers hindering correctional programmes as programmes are delivered in English and Afrikaans only.
- Dissatisfaction with case management committees regarding segregations
- Allegations of charges and negative case notes being made on their files without their knowledge
- Hygiene
- Dissatisfaction with management and lines of communication
- Dissatisfaction about security classification, review and upgrade of privilege status
- Lack of regular exercise
- Prolonged lockdown

The Deputy Minister was accompanied by a panel of ex-offenders from the DCS Ambassador Programme. They assist the department with communicating to the offender population.

Amongst the ambassadors were Miles Bhudu, and Collin Nxumalo who has played a pivotal role in building communication systems whilst incarcerated in Barberton Correctional Centre. Nxumalo currently runs DCS's halfway house in Naturena, Johannesburg for youth offenders. The ex-offenders encouraged offenders to form committees to activate participation by, and representation of, offenders in engagements with the area management.

Staff shortages and violence at St Albans Maximum Facility remain a concern to officials as they keep the centre functional while almost twenty of their colleagues are on injury on duty leave. Deputy Minister Makwetla has committed to finding lasting solutions.